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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 003038

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NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: GAMAL MUBARAK'S U.S. VISIT STIRS  
CONTROVERSY AT HOME

REF: A. CAIRO 2671

[B](#). CAIRO 2010

Classified by ECPO Minister-Counselor Michael Corbin for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Cairo is still buzzing a week after news broke over Gamal Mubarak's visit to the United States. The perception that Gamal attempted to conduct the visit "in secret" - only to be exposed by a chance White House sighting

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by a Jazeera correspondent, was a major focus of criticism from different quarters. Both the Egyptian commentariat and the Egyptian "street" are convinced that Gamal is determined to succeed his father, and many believe Washington is ready and willing to "install" him. The outcry prompted by the trip is evidence of public concern and animosity toward a perceived Gamal succession plan. Gamal and advisors mishandled the public relations angle of his visit, but a visit by him to Washington was bound to stir up controversy, no matter how carefully packaged. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Cairo is still buzzing a week after news broke over Gamal Mubarak's "secret" visit to the United States. We have been (informally) approached by many of our contacts, asking what the "real purpose" of Gamal's visit to the U.S. was. Although the fact that Gamal was renewing his pilot's license in the U.S. was reported, few are willing to believe that this was the main reason for the visit (although this was presented as a primary purpose for travel when Gamal's staff first raised the visit with the Embassy several weeks ago).

[1](#)3. (C) Instead, commentators in the independent media, and a number of Embassy contacts, believe that Gamal was visiting to get U.S. "approval" to succeed his father, while others (have come closer to the truth) by writing that Gamal went to Washington to convince the USG that the ruling NDP is serious about political reform. Some of our contacts have voiced surprise, and even indignation, that Gamal saw President Bush, who dropped by the meeting with NSA Director Hadley -- few if any appreciate the distinction between the POTUS drop-by and an Oval Office call. Indeed, leading pro-government daily Al-Ahram played up Gamal's encounter with the President. Its banner headline on May 17 read "Gamal Mubarak meets President Bush, Secretary Rice, and the National Security Advisor."

[1](#)4. (C) On May 17, a senior aide to Gamal contacted ECPO Counselor to push the GOE's line on the visit. The aide asserted that Gamal went to Washington to discuss the issue of reform in the region, rather than Egypt in particular, and emphasized that his visit came in the context of a series of U.S. visits by senior NDP/GOE figures. The aide seemed unconcerned about the fact that Gamal's Washington visit coincided with major developments in the Judges Club and Ayman Nour controversies at home. It was apparent that the concern in Gamal's camp was about whether it would be perceived at home as an attempt to plead for U.S. approval for his succession.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Gamal was savaged in the independent press for his visit - particularly because of the perception that the GOE wanted to keep it secret. Many noted that the story only broke when an Al-Jazeera correspondent assigned to cover the White House noticed Gamal and Ambassador Nabil Fahmy walking through the visitor's gate. Writing May 18 in the Independent daily Al-Masry Al-Yom, columnist Soliman Gouda was scathing about the perceived secrecy of the visit. While there is nothing wrong, or unusual, with a person like Gamal visiting Washington and meeting with USG officials, he argued, there is everything wrong with doing so in secret, which raises "1,000 questions" about the nature of the visit and its objectives.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Other observers quoted in the press took a still harsher tone. Political analyst Nabil Abdel Fattah said that "the U.S. and Israel want the current regime and its successor to remain in place," adding that the Mubarak Government was succeeding in using the MB to scare the west into support for Gamal as a successor. Cairo University Political Scientist professor Hassan Nafaa, among others cited the "secrecy" of the visit as "proof" that the regime

is pursuing Gamal's succession. The flamboyant MP Talaat El-Sadat, a nephew of the late President, offered one of the more colorful comments "I reject a President who comes to power riding on an American tank. I would rather it run me over."

17. (C) A leading civil society activist complained to poloff on May 22 that Gamal's visit to the White House, which she perceived as secret, sent a "strange signal" about the USG's commitment to democratic reform in Egypt. She linked the visit to other "mixed messages" from Washington to Egypt's democracy community, citing the contrast between A/S Welch's May 17 congressional testimony, in which he described the GOE's regional role as "irreplaceable," to A/S McCormick's strong criticism of the GOE on May 18.

18. (SBU) Al-Masry Al-Youm ran a banner headline on its May 22 edition quoting A/S Welch as denying that Gamal's visit to Washington signaled U.S. support for his succession to the presidency. The piece also quoted the Deputy Secretary, from the margins of the WEF event in Sharm el-Sheikh, emphasizing the U.S. position that the selection of Egypt's next president should be left to the Egyptian people.

19. (C) Comment: This episode underlines the sensitivity of the succession question on Egypt's domestic political scene and the depth of public sentiments against Gamal, or at least against his perceived ambition to succeed his father. The attempt by Gamal and his circle to keep his Washington visit low-key was clumsy and obviously backfired. But even the most astute public relations strategy probably could not have prevented the sort of domestic criticism and speculation inevitably prompted by a Gamal visit to Washington. End comment.

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